



## 70<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland Top Candidates Announced

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*Editor's note: Download group and individual photos at [https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News\\_Media/2017AliceCandidatesAnnounced.aspx](https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/News_Media/2017AliceCandidatesAnnounced.aspx)*

GREEN BAY – Six top candidates for the 70th Alice in Dairyland were announced today, a key step in the process of selecting Wisconsin's next "agricultural ambassador."

The six top candidates were announced at a press conference held at the Neville Public Museum in Green Bay. Following an extensive interview process, the next Alice in Dairyland will be selected from among the six candidates at the conclusion of the Alice in Dairyland Finals Program, May 11-13 in Brown County.

"The Alice in Dairyland program has a strong history of promoting Wisconsin's diverse agriculture industry, which now has a more than \$88 billion impact on Wisconsin's economy," said Ann O'Leary, 69<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland. "One of these finalists will carry on the tradition of traveling the state to teach audiences of urban and rural backgrounds about the importance of Wisconsin agriculture."

Over the next two months, the six candidates will participate in a rigorous interview process that will allow them to showcase communications and public relations skills required to be the next Alice in Dairyland. Although only one of the top candidates ultimately will be selected as the next Alice in Dairyland, the personal growth experienced by all of the candidates as result of the process will carry far into their future careers.

The candidates are:

**Abrielle Backhaus, Kewaskum**, was raised on Kettle Aire Acres dairy farm with her parents and two brothers. Washington County 4-H and FFA offered her many opportunities for communication and travel. She also took on many leadership roles within each organization. In 2016, with a journalism degree from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in hand, a background in the agriculture industry and a strong passion to share industry knowledge through publication, she joined the Agri-View newspaper staff as an assistant editor. In her free time she enjoys hiking, baking, crafting and spending time with family.

"Every day we learn something new, especially in the constantly evolving agriculture industry. As an ambassador for Wisconsin's agriculture, my goal is to share the stories of those who work daily to make the \$88.3 billion agriculture industry so strong. I want to educate and encourage consumers to know the diverse faces of its producers and agriculturists, and that the Wisconsin agriculture industry continues to evolve and strive for healthy and happy future generations."

**Jenna Crayton, Oak Creek**, grew up on the last family-owned and operated dairy farm in Milwaukee County. Along with dairy cattle, her family also owns a flock of commercial-type show lambs. She was heavily involved in the Racine County 4-H program, where she served as a junior member, 4-H Ambassador, and sheep leader for the Tucker 4-H Club. Along with 4-H, she also served as the 2013

Racine County Fairest of the Fair, and 2010 Racine County Farm Bureau Ambassador. Crayton's passion for agriculture led her to attend the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where in May, 2015 she obtained a bachelor of arts in communication with a double emphasis in interpersonal organizations and public relations, while minoring in business administration. Currently, she is continuing her education at Texas Tech University, where she is an agricultural communications master's student and a Texas Tech University student housing graduate assistant for Residence Education and Academic Programs. In her spare time, she enjoys being the vice president of the Texas Tech University Agricultural Education and Communications Graduate Organization, crafting, and spending time with family.

"As Alice in Dairyland, my goal will be to educate the public about Wisconsin's diverse \$88.3 billion agriculture industry through its rich history and stories. Through education I hope to bridge the gap between Wisconsin's producers and consumers to promote agricultural understanding and advocacy."

**Alexis Dunnum, Westby**, was raised on her family's fourth generation, organic beef and crops farm in Wisconsin's Driftless Region. Growing up, she was an active member of the Nerison 4-H Club and the Westby FFA. Dunnum showed beef steers, swine, and poultry each year at her county fair and served as the 2014 Vernon County Fairest of the Fair. She is currently a senior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, double-majoring in life science communications and Scandinavian studies and will receive a certificate in environmental studies. In the spring of 2016, Dunnum studied at the University of Southeast Norway and traveled the country independently to interview farmers about sustainable agriculture. Upon her return to the U.S., she interned with the National Farmers Union in Washington, D.C. Now in her final semester, she continues to spend her time as a member of Collegiate FFA, the Association of Women in Agriculture, and playing trumpet in the UW Marching Band.

"Wisconsin's agricultural industry has supported generations of family farmers and has become an integral part of our state's identity, as well as my own. As the 70<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland, I will exemplify what Wisconsin agriculture has taught me and educate people about our agricultural heritage and the opportunities that await the industry in the future."

**Crystal Siemers-Peterman, Cleveland**, found her passion for Wisconsin's diverse agricultural industry on her family's registered Holstein dairy farm. She was actively involved in the Manitowoc County Junior Holstein Association, Wisconsin Junior Holstein Association, and Manitowoc County 4-H. Through these organizations, she represented Wisconsin at national competitions in both dairy quiz bowl and dairy judging. She will graduate this coming May from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities with a major in agricultural and food business management and a minor in marketing. Previously, she interned at Sassy Cow Creamery, FLM+ Advertising Agency, and Land O'Lakes Inc. On campus she is involved in the National Agri-marketing Association, National Grocers Association, and Gopher Dairy Club.

"As Alice in Dairyland, I will promote positive messages about Wisconsin's agricultural products to both rural and urban audiences. I will use my various experiences, education, and outgoing personality to deliver consistent messages about Wisconsin's agriculture industry to diverse audiences."

**Kaitlyn Riley, Gays Mills**, is a multimedia journalist with WQOW News 18 in Eau Claire. Riley returns home to her family's dairy farm on weekends, where her parents milk 70 registered Jerseys. After

graduating with honors from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2014 with a degree in strategic communications and broadcast journalism, Riley served as the 48<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Fairest of the Fairs. Her passion for the fair industry and agritourism came from years of showing cattle at the local, state and national levels. During her collegiate career, she was involved in the Association of Women in Agriculture and Badger Dairy Club. Riley continues to promote agriculture and youth involvement as an active member of the Crawford County Dairy Promotion Committee and the Northern Wisconsin State Fair Fairest of the Fair Committee.

“As Alice in Dairyland, I hope to become a student and a teacher. I want to learn from the many faces of Wisconsin’s diverse \$88.3 billion agriculture industry and share their stories with urban and rural audiences. No matter how many generations people may be removed from the farm, my goal is to inspire all to return to their agricultural roots and have a better understanding of food, fuel and fiber production in Wisconsin.”

**Kelly Wilfert, Two Rivers**, grew up on a 700-acre farm producing fresh market fruit and vegetables, cash grain, and processing carrots. Wilfert was heavily involved with her family’s farm, as well as active in both 4-H and FFA. She will complete her bachelor’s degree in life sciences communication and agricultural economics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in May. During her college experience, she served as a Wisconsin State FFA Officer, worked as the American Farm Bureau’s Public Policy intern, and finished in the top four for the American Farm Bureau’s Collegiate Discussion Meet. She also volunteers for the Wisconsin Agricultural Education Center’s Exhibit Development Committee. Wilfert hopes to continue to spread the positive message of Wisconsin agriculture as Alice in Dairyland.

“My lifelong goal is to help bridge the gap between producers and consumers in Wisconsin agriculture. Every job in Wisconsin agriculture supports 1.46 jobs elsewhere in the state, bringing us all together around the dinner table. Coming from within the agricultural community, it would be an honor to serve as Wisconsin’s agricultural ambassador and share the immense impact of our industry with people of all ages and backgrounds.”

Alice in Dairyland is a one-year, full-time public relations position with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). The official start date for the 70<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland is June 5, 2017.

In this highly visible and fast-paced position, Alice in Dairyland travels throughout the state teaching rural and urban audiences of all ages about Wisconsin’s extensive agricultural industry. In the position, Alice in Dairyland cultivates relationships with television, radio and print media outlets; writes and delivers speeches; and utilizes social media to tell the stories of Wisconsin agriculture. Additional duties include developing and executing marketing plans, delivering classroom presentations, and networking with industry professionals.

Each year, a different Wisconsin County hosts the Alice in Dairyland interview activities, with Brown County serving as the host county this year. The 70<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland will be selected at the conclusion of the three-day finals program, May 11-13.

The public is welcome to attend three public events during the Finals in Brown County in May:

- Candidate Discussion Panel Dinner, Friday, May 12, Green Bay Botanical Garden, Green Bay; 5 p.m., Social Hour; 6 p.m., Meal and Observe Discussion (\$15);

- 70<sup>th</sup> Alice Finale Banquet & Selection of the 70<sup>th</sup> Alice in Dairyland, Saturday, May 13, Lambeau Field, Green Bay, 5 p.m. Social Hour; 6:30 p.m., Dinner; 7:30 p.m., Finale Program and Dessert Social including Live Music at 9 p.m.(\$30);
- 70<sup>th</sup> Alice Finale Program Only, Saturday, May 13, Lambeau Field, Green Bay, 7:30 p.m., (\$15).

For all event information and ticket sales, visit [aliceindairyland.com](http://aliceindairyland.com).

Direct program questions to Alice in Dairyland Program Manager, Ti Gauger at 608-224-5115 or to [Ti.Gauger@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Ti.Gauger@wisconsin.gov)